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ORCID# 0000-0002-0750-0417

Re-Evaluating T. S. Eliot's Use of Epigraph in Light of Deleuze and Guattari's Theory of Assemblage

Onur Ekler

Abstract

The function of epigraph in Eliot's poetry has become the focal point of a perennial debate for a long time. As it is the case, there have been different researches conducted on this inquiry in the scholarly field. Some critics argue that Eliot uses epigraph in homage to the literary tradition. They tend to undervalue the contribution of epigraph in his poetry since they regard its use as obscure and incomprehensible. On the other hand, some other critics consider it as a significant part of his poetry. They argue that Eliot's poetry would have lost its integrity without epigraph. Although both groups have a fair share in their studies on Eliot's use of epigraph, this argument still needs further considerations to have more insight into the role of epigraph in Eliot's poetry. To bridge this gap and to further discuss the complexity of the role of epigraph in Eliot's poetry, this study traces Eliot's use of epigraph in light of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblage, which is expounded in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second volume of their book, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1980)*. Similar to Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage theory, epigraph may function as one of poem's production components without losing its own integrity. It may function both as a unit of production and a product in itself. As such, it juxtaposes individual and universal aspects of poetry without distorting the poetic harmony. In this context, this article aims to study the role of epigraph in Eliot's poetry in line with Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage. To theoretically ground the argument, this article firstly explores the nature of Eliot's poetry, and then elucidates Deleuze-

Guattarian assemblage in detail. Lastly, it examines this function of epigraph in some of Eliot's selected poems.

Keywords: Assemblage, Epigraph, Poetry, Criticism, T. S. Eliot

Deleuze and Guattari'nin Asamblaj Kuramı Işığında

T.S. Eliot'ın Epigraf Kullanımını Değerlendirmek

Öz

Eliot'ın şiirlerinde epigrafın fonksiyonu uzun bir zamandır süregelen bir tartışmanın odak noktası olmuştur. Bu durum bu konu üzerine farklı araştırmalar yapılmasına vesile olmuştur. Bazı eleştirmenler Eliot'ın epigrafı edebi geleneğe saygısını göstermek için kullandığını ileri sürer. Epigrafın şiirdeki işlevini belirsiz ve anlaşılmasız olarak algıladıklarından epigrafın Eliot'ın şiirine olan katkısını göz ardı etmeye meyillidirler. Buna karşın, bazı diğer eleştirmenler epigrafın şiirin önemli bir unsuru olduğunu düşünürler. Bu eleştirmenler epigraf olmadan şiirin bütünselliğini yitireceğini ileri sürerler. Her iki grubun epigrafın fonksiyonuyla ilgili tartışmalarında haklılık payları olsa da, epigrafın rolünü daha iyi anlamak için daha fazla araştırma yapmak gerekir. Bu açığı kapatmak ve Eliot'ın şiirlerinde epigrafın rolünün karmaşıklığını daha detaylı tartışmak için bu çalışma Eliot'ın epigraf kullanımının, Deleuze ve Guattari'nin *Kapitalizm ve Şizofreni* (1980) adlı kitaplarının ikinci cildi *Bin Yayla* 'da ileri sürdüğü asamblaj teorisi ışığında izini sürer. Deleuze-Guattari'nin asamblaj kuramına benzer bir şekilde epigraf kendi bütünlüğünü kaybetmeden şiirin üretim unsurlarından biri olarak işlev görebilir. Kendi içinde başlıca bir üretim olduğu kadar başka bir üretimin bir unsuru olabilir. Bu bakımdan, şiirin bireysel ve evrensel unsurlarını şiirsel ahengi bozmadan bir araya getirir. Bu bağlamda, bu makale Eliot'ın şiirlerinde epigrafın rolünü Deleuze-Guattari'nin asamblaj teorisi ışığında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tartışmayı kuramsal olarak temellendirmek için, bu makale öncelikle Eliot'ın sanatsal yönünü araştırır, ardından Deleuze-Guattarian asamblaj kuramını ayrıntılı olarak açıklar ve son olarak da Eliot'ın seçili şiirlerinde epigrafın rolünü inceler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Asamblaj, Epigraf, Şiir, Eleştiri, T. S. Eliot

Introduction

Epigraph is an important characteristic of Eliot's poetry. Therefore, the function of epigraph in Eliot's poetry has long been discussed in the academic circles. Its ambiguous function has brought forth various interpretations. Some critics like Barzinji and Worthington tend to perceive the use of epigraph in Eliot's poetry as obscure and incomprehensible due to its ambiguous function. Whether it is a meaningful and integrative part of the poem is questionable and brings about uncertainty. They also argue that readers may find it confusing to make a connection between the epigraph and the poem in Eliot's poetry (Worthington 1; Barzinji 79). Mathiessen, an important critic on Eliot's poetry, claims that epigraph "is designed to form an integral part of the effect of the poem" (52). He further states that epigraph is a device that "is to enable the poet to secure a condensed expression in the poem itself" (52). Banerjee similarly expresses that epigraph for Eliot is the bridge that helps him identify with the giant figures of the literary canon (962). Likewise, Sirhan, another researcher, features the role of epigraph in building the intertextual relations in Eliot's poetry (1-7). Unlike the aforementioned early criticism on the contribution of the epigraph in Eliot's poetry, recent criticism of the Eliotic use of epigraph has shifted over time and developed a learned way of understanding it. For example, Sharratt argues that Eliot's frequent appeal to the use of quotations can be "a sign of erudition" or "a mark of elite authority" (224). Donoghue, however, highlights Eliot's pleasure in "keeping readers on their toes" by using epigraphs in contradiction with the poems (98). Moreover, Murphy refers to the revealing aspect of the Eliotic epigraph on the poem to come (317). He further argues, "[Eliot's] epigraphs serve the purpose of mind-opening exercises in the extension of language into thought and of thought into paradox" (228). It is no accident that Eliot's use of epigraph opens a variety of discussion. Eliot's explanation in relation to the role of epigraphs preceding his poem, "Burnt Norton" in a letter to Raymond Preston, 09 Aug 1945 may corroborate this point. Eliot says, "The value of such an epigraph [a phrase from Herakleitos] is partly due to the ambiguity and the variety of possible interpretations" (1165). Its ambiguous role is like a Sphinx riddle the answer of which will help to clear the fog over Eliot's complex poems. To better understand the role of the Eliotic epigraph still requires further exploration. Therefore, the argument of this study will embark on a new quest to shed a new light on the

enigmatic function of the Eliotic epigraph in his poetry. The epigraph in this study will be observed in light of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblage, considering the structural formation of an assemblage expounded by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second volume of their book, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980).

Similar to an assemblage, the use of epigraph in Eliot's poetry serves, in Deleuze and Guattari's perspective, for macro-and micro multiplicities. It not only functions as a unit in the production of the poem but it also seems to stand as a product that is aloof, detached, and somehow disconnected to the rest of the poem. In light of this argument, this article aims to examine Eliot's epigraph as Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage by carefully observing the function of epigraph in some of Eliot's selected poems. To theoretically ground the argument, this article firstly explores the nature of Eliot's poetry, and then elucidates Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage in detail.

T. S. Eliot: A Poet in the Purgatory

In his talk on the unity of European culture, he refers to the significance of learning from the past literature to sharpen one's creativity in one's poetic voyage (711). Therefore, one may note that Eliot's search for the originality in the Western literary tradition and his desire for the continuity of the Western civilization are likely to shape his approach towards the literary tradition. However, he is aware of the challenging path to create a truly original poetic identity in the deeply rooted tradition of the great poets like Shakespeare, Dante, and Donne. To speak in Bloom's terms, he feels overwhelmed by anxiety and belatedness, often reflected in his poetry (Bloom 29). However, such seemingly traumatic feelings surprisingly carry him to a state of mind continuously oscillating between killing and creating, objective and subjective, past and present, mythology and reality, reason and feeling, appreciation and criticism, conformity and novelty. Although his tortured mind caused by his fears, worries, and hesitations do some harm on his social/marital life, it is the same spirit that hones his poetic skills.

In the introduction to *Sacred Wood*, Eliot claims, "it is part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition to see literature steadily and to see it whole" (Eliot xiii-xiv). When considered from this point of view, his poetry may be seen as the preserved site for the literary

tradition since the past for Eliot, as Kirk notes, "is not a thing frozen, but lives in us" (35). Kirk also points out that the contemporaneity of the past is much felt in the literary quotes taken from various sources of authority in Eliot's poetry (52). These quotes- mostly unidentified, unattributed and not translated- might puzzle the readers at first glimpse due to their obscurity, but once they are translated by the readers, as Murphy claims, the readers can realize the intentional usage beyond the mere showing-off of Eliot's erudition (432).

In his poetry, Eliot's usage of direct quotes in their original languages might result from his wish to revive European literature and culture. This attitude might be regarded as the divergent point between Eliot and Ezra Pound to whom he owes a lot in forging his literary career. Unlike Eliot's view, Pound mostly favors translation over quotation in poetry since he assumes that translation is the bridge that blends the past with the new rhythms of the time (Huang 113). Despite their different methods, they both show respect and dignity for the past literature. In Eliot's case, his appreciation of the past tradition might be regarded as a significant part of his quest for becoming an original poet in the literary canon.

It is not wrong to claim that Eliot is a poet in purgatory. He is like Beckett's crippled Hamm whose words are dancing in the aporia of the ambiguous signifiers. He is stuck between past and present. Eliot suggests that "[the poet] is not likely to know what is to be done, not of what is dead, but of what is already living" (53). Hence the present is seen as the forming part of the past and vice versa, and the poem makes us aware of this by providing a kind of heteroglossia that implies a dialogic interaction between past and present discourses that make up one's culture and identity.

For Eliot, as Crawford argues, modernity is a death wish (20). He states that he adopted such a dreary view of life in the 1920s and 30s when the increasing complexity of the modern world together with the economical hardships exacerbated Eliot's hesitations and fears (20). However, this gloomy condition enables him to gain a new insight into looking things differently from the accepted norms of the literary canon. Thus, he feels the utmost need to develop a poetic style that best expresses the disconnected, episodic life in the modern world. He notices that the vagueness of the Victorian/Romantic poetry in style and expression is insufficient to portray the discontinuous, fragmented

nature of the modern world. He argues that Romantic poetry is too personal which is deeply invested in the recollections of emotions. He says, “poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (52-53). He claims that a poet should depersonalize oneself from one’s emotions so that the words that one uses can fully grasp the complexity surrounding us. Eliot uses the phrase “objective correlative” in *The Sacred Wood, Hamlet and His Problems*:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an “objective correlative”; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula for that particular emotion. (92)

He makes an analogy between a catalyst and a poet. Eliot exemplifies it with the fusion of sulphurous acid. Eliot emphasizes that platinum helps to produce a new compound without leaving its trace on either oxygen or sulphur dioxide. In other words, platinum is necessary to produce a new chemical compound but it is not contained in the new compound. Eliot draws a similarity between the function of platinum and that of the modernist poet in that the poet catalyzes past and present; tradition and innovation, as the platinum does with the chemical elements, and produces a new work out of this process (48). The continuous interplay of various forces is noticeable in his poetry. It manifests itself in the emotionally intense episodes or the seemingly disconnected vignettes. The poet like a catalyst fuses such disparate realities into a collage. However, this fusion does not destroy individuality. Each episode still stands on its own as much as serving for the universality of the poem. To examine the individual and collective aspects of Eliot’s poetry, it is important to discuss his use of the epigraph. Epigraph in his poetry not only preserves its individualistic elements, but it also seems to bear the whole poem in it. In this sense, it can be considered as an assemblage that simultaneously shelters micro and macro-multiplicities. In other words, it embraces the whole poem in it as well as playing a part in the constitution of the poem. To better understand it, next part will focus on Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory.

Deleuze-Guattarian Theory of Assemblage

To have insight into Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy, it is essential to understand the concept of assemblage. Most critics agree with the point that the English word "assemblage" is not the exact equivalence of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "agencement" in French. Nail points out that there is a subtle difference between the French word "agencement" meaning "a construction, an arrangement, a layout" and the English word "assemblage" meaning "the joining or union of two things (180)." Despite the difference, the critics tend to use the concept of assemblage in the original meaning of "agencement" by adhering to the early translation of the concept by Paul Foss and Paul Patton and later by Brian Massumi (De Assis 19).

In his dialogue with Parnet, Deleuze defines assemblage as "a multiplicity which is made up of heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures..." (Deleuze and Parnet 69). As De Assis mentions, assemblage has a fluid nature that is always mobile and nomadic, moving from one state to another (12). Assemblage for Deleuze and Guattari is "a living arrangement" (Yu 385). To exemplify the animistic aspect of assemblage, Buchanan refers to Guattari's analysis of Man Ray's dancer/danger photo. In the photo, he senses the dancing spirit in the co-functioning of the parts of the machine (384). For Deleuze and Guattari, assemblage is a desiring machine the parts of which are dancing in constant flux, and never moved by the totalizing principles but by the free, ceaseless interactions of its fragments (8).

Deleuze and Guattari analyze assemblage in two directions. On a horizontal axis, they make a distinction between the material and expressive components of the assemblage (88). They call them respectively, the machinic assemblages of desire and the collective assemblages of enunciation. As Buchanan explains, they are indispensable to but independent of each other (390). Buchanan exemplifies it with the relationship between sunset and the words "beautiful or melancholy":

a sunset is an array of colours produced by the diffraction of light, but this does not cause us to see it as beautiful or melancholic; by the same token, our concepts of beauty and melancholy do not compel us to apprehend sunsets in this way. (390)

On the other hand, “on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away (88).” Both movements have convergent and divergent points. In this context, assemblage can be regarded as the ceaseless arrangement of the territory, an intersecting point between content and expression. It can be likened to a landslide always already moving away from the gravitational force of the center. Deleuze explains the constantly shifting force of the machinic assemblage to centrifugality by metaphorically comparing it to Kleist’s marionette: “What defines a machine assemblage is the shift of a centre of gravity along an abstract line. As in Kleist’s marionette, it is this shift which gives rise to actual lines or movements” (Deleuze and Parnet 104).

Assemblage has a fluid nature. It arises in the ceaseless arrangement of the heterogeneous elements in its sudden, multi-directional movement between the material world and the world of signs. The reciprocal relationship between various elements at molecular and molar states is a never-ending process that is fluid, nomadic, and multiple. Deleuze and Guattari use another term, “rhizome” to explain the complex relations that entail assemblage. Rhizome, as Ferraz discusses, is the fluid space where the content and the expression are constantly being battled (86). Rhizome does not have beginning or end. It is always in the middle. Therefore, “any point of a rhizome can be connected to any thing other, and must be” (Deleuze and Guattari 7). It enables the perpetual becoming of different heterogeneous elements as in the example of wasp and the orchid (10). In the process of de- and re-territorialization, the wasp and the orchid form a link that produces “a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp” (10). The process of becoming is a perpetual event basing on the de- and re-territorialization process.

In the process of de- and re-territorialization, assemblage not only becomes a component in its constitution (Deleuze and Guattari call it “molecular” unit), but also the machine itself (molar unit). To elucidate this point, De Assis refers to Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion on proteins (13). Deleuze and Guattari argue that proteins are both molecules and molars. That is, they are both units of production and products (290). Various elements come together and constitute proteins and the arrangement of the proteins produces “the autoproduction of the unconscious” (290).

As one may note, Deleuze and Guattari's "assemblage" theory has a complex nature. To better understand it, Deleuze and Guattari appeal to different metaphors and examples. Among them, they use the term, "constellation." Similar to an assemblage, a constellation has a Self-organizing formation. As well as it develops "a kind of organism with a signifying totality," they claim that it may also continuously dismantle the components and create "a body without organs" (4). For further exemplifying their "assemblage" theory, Deleuze and Guattari benefit from Elias Canetti's observation of wolves' behaviors in the pack. Canetti observes that each wolf may behave individually on the hunt as well as it moves in harmony with the other wolves in the pack (54). Therefore, for Deleuze and Guattari, an assemblage is a multiplicity that has macro and micro principles. Ericson and Haggarty describe Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage as "a radical notion of multiplicity" because of its definition as "a multiplicity of heterogenous objects, whose unity comes solely from the fact that these items function together, that they work together as a functional entity" (608).

The characteristic of assemblage mentioned in the above-examples and metaphors will be the departure point to study Eliot's epigraph as assemblage. A careful reader of Eliot's poetry can possibly realize that Eliot's epigraph is not only a unit of production, but it is also a product itself. In other words, in his poetry, it is a singular event that can stand in itself as well as becoming a unit of assemblage through making rhizomatic connections to other events in the fluid space and time. Taken on this ground, the main section of this study will attempt to contextualize this theoretical argument by observing it in his selected poems.

Epigraph as an Assemblage in T. S. Eliot's Poetry

As mentioned above, the epigraph in Eliot's poetry serves simultaneously at micro and macro levels. Taking this into account, one may note the rhizomatic characteristic of epigraph in Eliot's poetry. Similar to a rhizome that "can be connected to any point" (Deleuze and Guattari 7), Eliot's epigraph act in the free play of association in semiotic chains. Deleuze and Guattari's example of the puppet strings can be given to substantiate it. They argue that the puppet strings are not connected

to the puppeteer, but to “a multiplicity of nerve fibers” (29), whereby the vibrations of the nerve fibers can create a meaningful association. Similarly, the vibrations triggered by the epigraph in the poem forms a kind of Yeatsian gyre¹, which has a chaotic nature. At macro level, the permeability of this energy through the seemingly fragmented parts helps to bind them together to achieve a sort of organic poetry.

The Epigraph in *The Waste Land* (1922), for example, serves for this purpose. It establishes synchronic and diachronic relations simultaneously. Through this function, the poem runs smoothly, and makes a collage of the dissimilar images despite the immediate fluctuations between the micro and macro events featured in the vignettes. The poem, as Eliot stresses in line 22, is “a heap of broken images where the sun beats” (Eliot 53). If one speaks in Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology, in the poem, each image has “its own line of flight” (24), and develops nomadic relations with other images, but simultaneously they get on “the plane of consistency” (25) to have the macro-multiplicity that constitutes itself in the process of becoming. It is important to note that the epigraph and the images featured in the vignettes have rhizomatic relations to each other in the poem even though they seem loosely connected to each other.

The Epigraph in *The Waste Land* is a quotation from Petronius Arbiter’s *Satyricon*, which mentions the words of the Sybil of Cumae: “I have seen with my own eyes, the Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked her, ‘What do you want?’ she replied, ‘I want to die’” (52). This epigraph alludes to the myth of the Sibyl of Cumae. She is the ancient prophetess of Apollo who cries for death. However, Apollo curses her, granting her the immortality but not the youth. She is a withered woman crying for death. Although this curse in the epigraph stands aloof and meaningful in its own way, it also builds a kind of organism that expands connections vertically and horizontally in the poem. It sets the tone for *The Waste Land* that repetitively evokes the sterility and stagnation of the modern world, which, according to Eliot, has lost the death-rebirth cycle that is the leitmotif in the ritualistic myths. Following Ezra Pound’s advice, Eliot uses the myth of Sibyl as the epigraph. Sibyl is the decaying figure who could not complete the natural cycle: death-fertility-resurrection. The Sibyl’s sterility symbolizes the rottenness of the modern world. Bloom argues that the Sibyl as the embodiment of Eliot’s contemporary life is an intentional design to lead the reader through “a culture of living death” (29).

Throughout the poem, one witnesses the reverberations of the decaying, desolate nature in many different allusions to the private and collective, the past and present experiences of the humankind. The increasing tension caused by the echoes of the sameness also blurs the boundaries between the real and the unreal, thus destroying the spatio-temporal ground of the poem. The epigraph in *The Waste Land* functions as a magnet that keeps the fragmented images together. It propels a continuous dynamism that enables it to converge and diverge with other vignettes in the poem.

There are several significant figures such as Madame Sosostris and Tiresias in the poem that echo the prophecy of the Sibyl in the epigraph. They can be regarded as the metonyms or the empty shells through which the Sibyl's desire flows but never to be fulfilled. They act like the puppets whose strings vibrated by the desire of the Sibyl. Their vibrations constitute the unifying sensibility of the poem at macro level while they sustain their differences at micro level. Madame Sosostris with her wicked pack of cards and Tiresias' with his visionary are the unifying devices that enable Eliot to knit the disparate images together. However, their prophecies are just the resonances of what has already been mentioned in the epigraph. Madame Sosostris foresees the fate of the major symbolic characters of the poem such as Belladonna, Phoenician Sailor, the lady of situations, the Lady of the Rocks, and the Hanged Man. However, her apocalyptic vision about future is quite gloomy and she says, "I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring" (Eliot 54). It implicitly symbolizes that modern men live physically but they are spiritually dead. In this regard, people have been a part of the great machines of industrial society dominated by the dangerous everyday routine. In the second section of the poem, one may well notice the repetitive words that signify nothingness and sameness. In the lines: "I never know what you are thinking. Think" (57) and "You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember/ Nothing?" (57). The speaker draws our attention to the imbalance between thought and action. The modern world is trapped in the vicious cycle. It is best observed in the rich lady's rashness and anxiety to search for new activities after she is fed up with the chess game: "What shall I do now? What shall I do? / I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street" (57). This emphasis of rashness is also given in the story of Lil in a repetitive manner "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" (58-59). The main point is that people have lost their patience, and they want to

have quick solutions to their problems, which disrupt balance in nature as in the Cumean Sibyl myth. Eliot strategically uses these characters to allude to the worn-out modern man. The speaker sympathizes with all characters with these lines: “Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, /Looking into the heart of light, the silence” (54). In brief, sheltering the universal and individual elements in its fabric, epigraph functions as a fluid space that enables Eliot to compose a concerto out of the seemingly dissonant lines.

Eliot’s *Gerontion* (1920) firstly planned as part of *The Waste Land*, later published in its own right thanks to Ezra Pound’s advice also starts with an epigraph (Johnson 61). It opens with an epigraph quoted from *William Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure*:

Thou hast nor youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both. (Shakespeare, Act 3, Scene 1) (Eliot 29)

As the epigraph of the poem, Eliot’s reference to Friar Lodowick’s (Claudio) exhortation to Claudio about the petals of life as the illusory stages in *William Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure* enables him to form rhizomatic connections among the metonymic chain of the seemingly unrelated events in *Gerontion*. Throughout the poem, the speaker’s search for a meaning in the futility of modern life given in juxtaposition with an aging man’s sentiments towards past, present and future is echoed in different sources to which Eliot referred. Long before Derrida who argues that the signified is always, already deferred in the sign system, Eliot is aware of the impossibility of moving with the principle of totality particularly in the aftermath of war. In his quest for the signified, Eliot appeals to the various references to express the inexpressible. Line 17 in the poem, “The word within a word, unable to speak a word” (29) reveals, to speak in Derrida’s terms, Eliot’s implication of the free interplay of signs, which is, according to Derrida, “a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble” (923). Thus, Eliot’s nomadic flight in the metaphorical pool of signifiers creates a harmony out of the seemingly dissonant rally of words devoid of the signified. The epigraph and other references in the poem reflect an echoing cry of the absurdity of life. The polyphonic texture of the poem presents, what Eshelman argues,

“the failure to recognize the history’s teachings that our lives have become meaningless to us” (89). In *Gerontion*, the speaker identifies the desolate situation of the modern world with the ageing man aware of the bitter fact concerning, what J. M. Major mentions, “the world’s failures, and blind follies, [...], an apocalyptic vision of the ruin toward which civilization is moving” (29). Alluding to both the mysterious figures of the modernity and the giant playwrights of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods in the fluid space of the poem, Eliot attempts to evoke the simultaneity of eternity.

The Love Song of J.A. Prufrock is T. S. Eliot’s another major poem, which starts with an epigraph. As in *The Waste Land* and *Gerontion*, it also plays an important role as an assemblage in presenting the concurrent vibrations between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic fibers of the events within the poem:

If I but thought that my response were made
to one perhaps returning to the world,
this tongue of flame would cease to flicker.
But since, up from these depths, no one has yet
returned alive, if what I hear is true,
I answer without fear of being shamed
(Epigraph trans. in *The Love Song of J. A. Prufrock*) (Eliot 3)

Taken from Dante’s *Inferno*, Canto 27, this epigraph is the desiring machine in the poem as well as becoming a functioning part in the production of the poem. The epigraph becomes the heart of the rhythm that co-vibrates with the heterogenous elements in the poem to convey the echoing voice of the suffering humanity in the modern world despite the shape-shifting images, characters and scenes. In other words, Eliot uses the epigraph to make fluid and mobile associations synchronically and diachronically among the seemingly disorganized scenes in the poem as if drawing a line in a Mobius strip.

Guido da Montefeltro’s eternal punishment is juxtaposed with Prufrock’s worries, anxieties and hesitations throughout the poem. Like Guido, Prufrock desires to escape from a hell like modern world, which imprisons him. He is stuck in time and space. He suffers from the inertia of the modern age in which words and action are out of balance. Hence,

Prufrock staggers and gets lost in questions. His cowardice prevents him from acting. Prufrock hesitates: “Do I dare? And, Do I dare? / Do I dare / Disturb the universe?” (4). Eventually he decides to act, but he does not know how and where to begin: “And how should I begin?” (5) He lacks Dante or Hamlet’s courage in his descent into hell:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the Prince; no doubt, an easy tool. (7)

He thinks himself cursed not to speak and act again. His tongue tortures him as Guido’s flaming tongue to him. Like Guido, he feels condemned. He resembles himself to an insect pinned down onto wall (5). Its legs are wriggling but cannot move. The nomadic flights caused by Prufrock’s sudden leaps from his desire to ask big questions to some trivial questions like whether he should eat peach or part his hair or roll the bottom of his trousers create a rhizomatic space where everything can be connected to everything. Eliot uses the epigraph in this poem by preserving its own territory but making it gradually lose its gravitational force. Thanks to this, it becomes a functioning unit co-vibrating with different characters, images, and scenes created throughout the poem to portray the suffering humanity in the modern world.

Eliot’s another poem, *Hollow Men* (1925) begins with two epigraphs that unequivocally reverberate throughout the poem. The first one, “Mistah Kurtz-he dead” (78) is a reference to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. The latter, “A penny for the Old Guy” (79) appears to be an allusion given to Guy Fawkes thought to have been responsible for the Gun Powder Plot. Although they do not seem to be related at first glance, the epigraphs feature the fragmentation in the psyche of the modern man. While the first epigraph signals how destructive knowledge devoid of wisdom obliterates the seemingly civilized man in the dehumanized society, the latter kindles a light to redemption from the mechanical cage that imprisons the modern man. Guy Fawkes’s daring acts can be interpreted as a pushback to the inorganic state of the so-called civilization where Marlow witnesses the gradual destruction of the tribesmen as a consequence of the illumination idea, “Civilization” that tragically glitters on the heart of darkness.

However violent or insurgent such figures are, it is implied in the poem that such daring figures no longer exist in modern world. In fact, the references to Kurtz's death and Fawkes's straw effigy in the epigraphs imply loss of such violent, rebellious souls in the modern world. They also hint at the modern man's cowardice and timidity. His pusillanimity resonates with negative connotations such as "hollow men / stuffed men / fading star / empty man" (79) in the poem. In the first section of the poem, the speaker's desire to disguise himself in "rat's coat" and "crow skin" might also exemplify modern man's timid nature.

Eliot is aware of the fact that the bloody war caused an atrophy to people's senses. They lost the ability to act. In line 13, the speaker stresses this point saying, "paralyzed force, gesture without motion." Their words became meaningless, dry. They lost the traditional pillars, which they once held onto in pre-war period. They were cast adrift. They began to worship false Gods. The apocalyptic tone in the nursery rhymes is not coincidental. Eliot knows that something is rotten in European civilization since it lacks vigor, vitality, and energy. Howard as a critic of Eliot's *Hollow Men* interprets the last section of the poem as a good omen for the rebirth claiming that "the end is not the explosive finale they had anticipated but rather an unexpected and almost silent precursor to a spiritual beginning at which they may arrive only by breaching the barrier of despair and death and embracing the light found in the transformation induced by rebirth" (11). However, unlike Howard's claim, Eliot laments over destruction, fragmentation and decay in the Western civilization and seems to draw a gloomy image of the Post-war period.

Eliot's juxtaposing such figures like Kurtz, Fawkes in the epigraphs with the speaker as the mouthpiece of modern man in the rest of the poem may remind us of Prufrock's relationship with Guido in the epigraph to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Just like Prufrock, the speaker in *Hollow Men* is aware of his cowardice and inadequacy of daring great things in contrast to the historical figures mentioned in the epigraphs. Such revelatory awareness is raised in the shocking contrast heightened between the characters in epigraphs and the speakers of the poems. As in his other poems, Eliot's use of epigraphs as an assemblage in *Hollow Men* has a rhizomatic nature as well since Eliot is able to create a nomadic space where unrelated things can coexist and bring forth originality and new dimensions in

the poem without losing any individualistic tunes at the expense of the unifying harmony.

Conclusion

As one can realize, there is a strict connection between epigraph and the rest of the poem to which it is attached in Eliot's poetry. As discussed above, the use of epigraphs as an assemblage brings readers a deeper and richer understanding of Eliot's poetry. They also enable Eliot to create organic unity in his poetry by simultaneously vibrating the fibers of micro and macro events in the related poems. Like Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage, it constructs the poem on a paradoxical space folding back on itself where micro and macro events naturally converge or diverge at any point without breaking the poetic harmony.

The epigraph shelters the whole poem in itself while preserving its individual nature within the poem. That is, epigraph has an organic form when it is considered at metaphorical space. To better understand it, it is noteworthy to refer to Coleridge's analogy² between the seed and the growth of the plant (qtd. in Abrams 171). If the epigraph for Eliot is interpreted in this analogy, it can be viewed as the seed. The whole poem lies in the secret power of the epigraph. While it is growing, it begins to evolve into many forms assimilating its substance till it finally reaches the highest potentiality. In Eliot's poetry, the desired act in the epigraph brings on a metonymic chain of episodes in a non-linear way but at macro level, they coexist with one another in order to render the reconciliation between the dissonant elements possible.

Notes

- ¹ Yeats uses the word to describe the unformulated, chaotic energy in his poetry.
- ² Despite Eliot's bitter criticism of romantic tradition, his use of epigraph in his search for universal poetry seems to bring him closer to Coleridge's definition of Subjective Universality in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817).

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